



YARDS AND GARDENS

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POTTING AND REPOTTING HOUSEPLANTS

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Cultivating plants in containers requires occasional replanting from one container to another. For good plant growth, both the initial potting and repotting operations require care to avoid injury to the plant and provide optimum growth conditions in the new container. When transplanting plants in containers, consider such factors as size and condition of the plant, size and type of container, type and amount of soil mixture, and prevention of mechanical damage to the plant.

Plant Size. Small plants transplant more readily than larger plants; however, any size plant which is already established in a container can be repotted readily. When first planting into pots, select small plants from which you do not have to remove many roots to fit the plant into the container. Pot rooted cuttings when the roots are about 1/2 inch long. Seedling plants will transplant most readily as soon as the first two true leaves have formed.

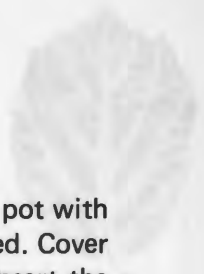
Plant Condition. Most plants transplant more readily when in an active growing state. Dormant or flowering plants will not produce root growth and establish themselves in the new pot as readily. Plants should not be wilted at time of transplanting. Be sure your plants are well irrigated in advance of repotting. Clean up any insect infestation and prune out any diseased portions prior to repotting.

Container Type. Plants can be grown in almost any container, but it is best to use containers with drainage holes. When plants are desired in containers without drain holes, pot the plants in drained pots which will fit inside the other containers. Several small pots can often be combined into a larger jardiniere or planter with sphagnum moss packed around the sides of the pots for support and to evaporate excess water from the planter.

Container Size. Normally it is best to keep each pot plant in the smallest size container needed for its current stage of development. This conserves growing space, allows for gradual increase in pot size (and new soil) as the plants develop, generally looks better (small plants in large pots look lost), and allows more versatility in moving plants or arranging plants in groups.

Container size can also be adjusted to manage irrigation schedules. Plants which need more frequent watering can be moved to larger pots with more water storage capacity. The quantity and type of soil mix determine how much water is retained in the pot for plant use.

Soil Type. Container plants require prepared soils or potting mediums for good success. Some prefer mixtures that retain a maximum amount of water (African violets, most tropical foliage plants, ivy). Others prefer soils that drain rapidly and retain only a small amount of water (cacti, most sedums, and other succulents). Request a copy of "Potting Soil Mixes" for detailed directions on preparing soil mixtures. Ask your florist, nurseryman, or plant store representative what type of soil your plants prefer or look up the soil mixtures preference in a garden encyclopedia at your library. Be sure your potting soil is damp to the touch before you begin potting.



The Potting Process. Start the potting process by covering the drain hole in the bottom of the pot with a layer of coarse material (broken pot chips, gravel) to prevent the hole from becoming clogged. Cover the drainage layer with at least 1/2 inch of fresh potting mixture. You are now ready to insert the plant.

If you are repotting from another pot, gently crumble some of the old soil ball away. Place the resulting root ball in the center of the new container and fill around it with potting soil while holding the plant in the desired position. Grip the container on either side and firm the soil around the roots with your thumbs or in large containers tamp the soil with a blunt tool. The soil mix should be firm enough that when the plant is lifted, the soil and pot are lifted with it.

If you are potting a plant the first time, trim the root system (if necessary) to fit the pot. Do not bend or wind roots into the pot. It is better to prune them to fit without bending. If this requires extensive pruning be sure to prune the top back proportionately. Hold the plant in place and fill around the roots. Press the soil firmly around the root system.

Finish filling the pot to approximately 1/2 inch from the top. In standard flower pots, fill to one-half the depth of the rim. This leaves enough space for watering with sufficient water to saturate the soil.

As soon as you finish potting or repotting plants, irrigate by filling the pot to the brim. Add water until a small amount seeps out the drain hole. This will assure that you have completely filled the reservoir capacity of the potting soil.

How Often? Most houseplants should be repotted into fresh soil once a year, even if they have not grown sufficiently to move into large pots. Small, rapidly growing plants may require repotting into larger containers every three to four months.

Assistance from Washington State University is available to all persons, without regard to race, color, or national origin.